DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 362 UD 031 376

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TITLE Who's Walking with Me? Dealing with Violence in Schools.
PUB DATE [96]
NOTE 21p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; High Risk Students; High Schools; High School Students; *Instructional Leadership; Juvenile Gangs; *Principals; Program Development; *School Security; Student Attitudes; Tutorial Programs; Urban Schools; Urban Youth; *Violence
IDENTIFIERS *El Paso Independent School District TX

ABSTRACT

Many of today's children fear school because of violence. Some children do not feel safe going to school, so they stay home. Others are growing up in dysfunctional families, and are not prepared for school or able to perform well at school. Parental help, which is needed at school when problems arise, may be lacking for these children. Among the problems confronting schools dealing with violence is the necessity for keeping intruders out. Principals are in key positions to prevent violence, whether it be caused by cultural or racial conflict, gangs and weapons in school, sexual harassment, or physical intimidation. They can identify potential gang development and provide appropriate responses to altercations and develop guidelines for security and supervision in the schools. A principal from a high school in El Paso (Texas) describes techniques he has used to reduce violence in the school and discusses the types of hands-on programs he has implemented. His Kids in Need of Attention program focused on at risk students through the intense personal involvement of the principal. It evolved into a tutoring program that eventually resulted in a 98% graduation rate among these students. The discussion is illustrated with photographs of some of the student participants. (Contains 15 references.) (SLD)

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WHO'S WALKING WITH ME?: DEALING WITH VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This abstract discusses the problems going on outside as well as inside our schools. This may seem ironic to some, but many of today's children fear school because of the violence. The following five categories are discussed in further detail: (1) Some children do not feel safe going to school, so they do not attend; (2) Another concern is children growing up in dysfunctional families; (3) Parental help is needed at school when dealing with problems that arise at home; (4) Keeping intruders out of our schools is extremely vital to keeping our schools safe; (5) Principals exercise their power in order to prevent violence. School principals are in key positions to prevent violence, whether it be cultural or racial clashes, gangs and weapons in school, sexual harassment, or physical intimidation. They can identify potential gang development, appropriate responses to altercations, and guidelines for security and supervision in our schools. Administrators can reduce the potential of student violence caused by impulse, through control, and conflict resolution skills. A principal shares the types of programs he assessed with the gang leaders in his school, its success, and other types of "hands on" programs he implemented with his students. Included are photos of the youths while involved in these programs and the after effect it took on some of them who graduated high school.

WHO'S WALKING WITH ME?: DEALING WITH VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

Society has its hands full when dealing with today's youth. We not only have violence in the community, it is inside our schools as well. This issue has been an ongoing problem since the beginning of time, and with time, it has escalated. The problem of school violence has been on the rise and there has really been no light at the end of the tunnel. School administrators sometimes feel as if they are experiencing postmodernism when dealing with this issue of violence. Aithough there have been various programs, for example, the "Lobo Posse", Kids in Need of Attention ("KINA"), or the school modeling program, administered in El Paso High School and Magoffin Middle School in El Paso, Texas that deal with prevention of school violence, how can administrators find solutions to the problems when they actually starts from within the child's home?

DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

There have been several ideas implemented in the school systems that address the removal of the violent youth from the classroom, however, it is difficult to determine the types of programs that have really been effective in preventing these violent children from becoming professional criminals. Researchers have identified several major causes for the increase in violent behavior, causes so entangled that attempting to address one while ignoring another is to risk failure altogether (Walker, 1995). Changing an individual once he is set in his ways is sometimes next to impossible, but positively molding a child at a young and vulnerable age is definitely possible.

Some children have extremely rough living conditions. Frustration, hurt, abuse, and fear arrive at school in many forms (Hill, 1994). They have to live with poverty, drugs, unemployed parents, abusive parents, or illiterate parents, and violence in their neighborhood. With these

examples in home surroundings, the educational system cannot expect a child not to act aggressively at school.

What are administrators to do with students who are "uncontrollable"? In a 1993 national poll, the public ranked drug abuse, discipline, and fighting or violence as second, third, and fourth among the 10 biggest problems facing schools. Only school funding concerns ranked higher (Ceperley, 1994). Because the problems often begin at home, the solutions to many of these problems can be found within the students' households. First, discipline in the household has to be present and active. If a child comes to school with the attitude that he can conquer school with violence because that is how things are done at home, our schools will never change.

Violent behavior is learned through observation. If a child lives with violence at home, she will likely grow up thinking that this is acceptable behavior. As a result, once the child reaches school age, she will most likely act out with violence toward other children to resolve conflicts at school. Unfortunately, schools are given the authority to discipline but receive very little support from home. By and large, parents tend to believe and support their children over the word and action of teachers and administrators (Wood, 1995). Some of these parents do so with the mind set that their children are angels, incapable of negative action. These parents need to listen to the administrators and teachers with an open mind when being told that their child has a discipline problem, because support from home is vital to the child's success in positively interacting with her school mates.

Therefore, if there is to be light at the end of the tunnel, discipline has to start at home at a very young age. If there is discipline at home, there is structure and with structure comes respect for others. If a child cannot understand respect, he cannot be expected to be respectful toward others. It is very difficult to deal with a child at school who does not respect her parents,

because she also usually does not respect her teachers. As a result, parental involvement in this regard is essential.

KEEPING INTRUDERS OUT

Trying to deal with school violence through the inside is one thing, but dealing with intruders who enter our schools and cause violence is another. School administrators must make it as difficult as possible for outside elements to infiltrate the school. The following nine suggestions for administrators are designed to do just that (Gerl, 1992):

1. Ask yourself security conscious questions about your school's physical plant.
2. Control and monitor access to the school.
3. Upgrade the quality of supervision when students are outside the school building.
4. Develop security awareness in neighbors.
5. Keep accurate, factual records of unusual occurrences.
6. Develop a professional relationship with the local law enforcement agency.
7. Investigate the services of a private security company.
8. Seek professional advice.
9. Develop a comprehensive school emergency plan.

If administrators follow these nine suggestions, intruders should find it extremely difficult to enter the school grounds without being caught.

GANGS

Everyone agrees that young people are involved in an increasing amount of violence, in schools and their communities. Dealing with youth whose lives are touched by violence takes a heavy toll on administrators and school personnel. It has become a daily obstacle to make schools safe places for students and staff members.

However, as discussed above, violence is a learned behavior, not a random, uncontrollable, or inevitable occurrence. Therefore, society can step in and reduce or prevent young people's involvement in violence. High school principals are in key positions to prevent violence, whether it is between cultural and racial clashes, gangs or weapons in school, or physical intimidation.

How can school administrators identify when a gang is forming? Sometimes, many students form a group and by the following day, that group diminishes by itself. According to the national Association of Secondary School Principals (George, 1990) it is imperative for schools and districts to identify potential gang development, since gang activity and gang violence seems to be increasing in public schools. The first step in this procedure is to meet with a local law enforcement agency to determine whether or not gang activity is actually developing in the school or community, as opposed to students just "hanging out" together. In this connection, "gang activity" has been defined as an overt act that is confirmed by two independent sources, one of whom is reliable, as involving gang members. Similarly, a "delinquent gang" is a group of six or more people who, while acting in concert, have committed a crime or some delinquent act, or who have engaged in an activity that disrupted the orderly operation of a school or school activity. Gang members must share some common bond, and there must be some infrastructure that facilitates the carrying out of common activities.

Schools and the community must discuss the and possibilities of gang activity with the appropriate law enforcement agencies and other community groups before gangs become a reality. If gang activity is a threat, then the principal should implement several strategies in an attempt to prevent violence (Blauvelt, 1981). Hopefully this will help eliminate the problem before it develops. Some such strategies include: (1) assigning school personnel to specific areas

of the school during times when students are not directly supervised; (2) establishing a channel of communication to warn school personnel and students of an altercation; (3) developing information sources in the school and community and share the information with school personnel and administrators; (4) establishing a "rumor control center" if tips on impending fights or altercations continue.

Principals are intimidating faces around campus. They should use the following means of reducing school violence (Kadel and Follman, 1993). The principals and administrators should maintain a high profile by walking the halls and school grounds regularly. They should also visit classrooms frequently and make themselves readily available to teachers, students, and parents. In addition, they should express sincere feelings toward students, a genuine interest in their lives, and a belief in their potential for success. They should develop relationships with students leaders, who tend to affect the school climate, either negatively or positively, in order to influence their activities and enlist their support. They should develop a crisis-management plan for dealing with the possibility of violent intrusions from the community into the classroom. Finally, they should link out-of-school suspension for violent behavior with long-term preventive and rehabilitative strategies.

RACIAL OR CULTURAL CLASHES

Very closely related to gangs is the problem of racial or cultural clashes that lead to violence in our schools, as gangs are often composed of youngsters of the same ethnic, racial or cultural group. Nevertheless, it has been found that the strengths of "group culture" can protect against violent behavior and victimization (Suntag, 1995). In this regard, if school programs to reduce school violence are developed, implemented, and evaluated with a sensitivity to cultural differences and with the involvement of the groups and communities they are designed to serve,

then such ethnic and racial cultures can act as buffers for violence. With such involvement, these cultures can protect against the social risk factors by providing a pattern for living values, social support, and reinforcement of a positive sense of self and of one's group.

Prevention of racial and ethnic conflict should begin the first day of kindergarten and should continue through high school. Whether or not such has occurred uniformly, each high school principal should develop a consistent program of curriculum development to confront stereotyping and encourage cross-cultural understanding. Such programs should provide students and staff with regular opportunities to discuss prejudice and ethnic or racial conflict in an atmosphere that stresses shared values of fairness, democracy, and honesty. Next, the administrators should find ways of grouping students to provide opportunities for learning the skills of group dynamics and conflict resolution. Finally, the administrators should reach out to the minority community in ways that improve communication and overcome the reluctance of parents to become involved in school (Curio, 1993).

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Another way of maintaining a safe school climate is by creating a sense of ownership in the school, through involvement of students, parents, school personnel and members of the community in conflict resolution. As one author stated, this concept is based on the premise that "thieves don't rob their own houses (they may not clean their rooms, yet they won't vandalize the kitchen)" (Cook, 1995). Conflict management allows potentially violent conflicts to be identified through cooperation from students and staff. The problem is then referred to a conflict management team, comprising of elected student leaders, faculty, staff, and members of the surrounding community who attempt to resolve the conflict to the satisfaction of all parties.

An effective conflict management program must be integrated into the fundamental structure of the school and not just initiated or used by a few. Therefore, faculty and staff must be educated about the benefits and application of such a program, then must be given an opportunity for input in the development of the program. Again, this promotes a feeling of ownership in the program and its goals. It is also important to have student leaders, as perceived by their peers, to be conflict managers. This gives the program legitimacy in the eyes of the students. Similarly, the person who is appointed as program director should be a dynamic individual who can motivate others, build enthusiasm and handle problems within the program.

Once the conflict managers are identified, a training program should allow the managers to practice the techniques and process of conflict resolution, stressing a mutually satisfying resolution to the problem, rather than stressing fault. It is imperative that each case that is referred to the conflict management team be documented in detail, outlining the issues, the resolution, if any, and containing the signatures of the participants. Any agreements, or lack thereof, should be carefully outlined for future reference. It is necessary to hold regular meetings with conflict managers to share success stories and current data, as well as boost morale.

The emphasis of this type of program then shifts from reactive to proactive behavior, where each member of the school society, including the community, becomes a participant in maintaining a common goal: a safe school environment.

RESPONSES TO ALTERCATIONS

It will not be possible to resolve all conflicts within the conflict management program, because some confrontations will occur without any advance warning. In preparation for such instances, principals should also implement policies that will enable the administrators and other

school personnel, such as janitors, clerical staff, teachers, teacher's assistants, and volunteers to handle altercations, should they occur, in order to prevent or minimize injuries and damages. Principals should teach the following steps in responding to occurrences of violence (George, 1990):

1. Walk to the site of the altercation and, using an authoritative voice, state that the altercation must stop immediately. If possible, obtain help from other staff members along the way.
2. After analyzing the situation, attempt to separate the combatants, being wary of weapons.
3. Obtain any needed medical assistance and call the police/security, if necessary.
4. Disperse onlookers.
5. Ask one staff member to record the names of witnesses: ask another to remain with the injured parties; another to remain with the assailant until the police/security or the investigating administrator arrives.
6. Preserve the crime scene, if necessary.

This type of training will also result in a safer school environment and minimize injuries and damages, despite the occasional outbreak of violence.

SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

A principal that has made a difference in a couple of schools in the El Paso Independent School District is Mr. Manuel Aguirre. During his years as an assistant principal and as a principal, he has come up with a few programs that were designed especially for at-risk youths.

Mr. Aguirre was an assistant principal at El Paso High School for 11 years. He "was tired of prevention programs that do little but push papers around and encumber teachers with too many rules and regulations"(Olvera, 1988). He came up with a program called Kids In Need of Attention ("KINA"). "The KINA program was organized with the purpose of correcting or

addressing the cause that creates the lack of study skills. The students involved were in desperate need of attention" (Aguirre, 1987).

This program was started in August of 1987. A control group of 18 hard core students were used. Mr. Aguirre took these students under his wing and monitored their every move. He sent memos to all of their teachers assuming full responsibility for the students. The teachers were to send Mr. Aguirre a progress report if their GPA dropped below 80. He also requested their report cards, course verification slips, and schedules be sent directly to him. The teachers needed to inform Mr. Aguirre if the students were truant, tardy, or if their behavior was unacceptable. During the course of the year, Mr. Aguirre showed these students that he indeed did care and the students began to respect him. He was not soft on them at all. In fact, he often found himself answering phone calls from some of the students' parents when their children did not want to get up and attend school. Mr. Aguirre's response to this was for the parent to tell the child that he was on his way to go get him out of bed. By the time Mr. Aguirre was driving down the road to the student's house, he often encountered the student already on his way to school.

The program became so popular, that Mr. Aguirre's list continued to grow. His 18 students from 1987 increased to over 35 students by 1988. He found that he could not do it alone, so he recruited teachers from the school to tutor students on a one-to-one basis. He did not have a hard time recruiting these volunteers, because of the success of this program. Mr. Aguirre's direct involvement with the students resulted in a 98% graduation rate.

Another of Mr. Aguirre's programs was "The Lobo Posse". This program was active in Magoffin Middle School and was first available to eighth grade at-risk students. Mr. Aguirre picked out 10 of the most disruptive students and basically made them his "sheriffs" at school. They were each given a walkie-talkie and a gray T-shirt with the logo "Lobo Posse" on it. They

patrolled the school and reported suspicious activities during school hours. They also learned about law enforcement from the city, state, and federal agencies. Mr. Aguirre took this idea from the "County Sheriff's Explorer Scout program in which teen-agers work with law enforcement officers" (Perez, 1990). The students also studied police codes and the Texas Penal Code. This program was such a huge success that by the end of the school year, Mr. Aguirre had many interested students.

Finally, Mr. Aguirre implemented the Magoffin Models Program, in which any girl in the school could join. They met at 7:30 am before school. The girls were given lessons in self-improvement and social graces, posture, walking, nutrition, skin care, appropriate make-up application, and self-confidence (Reid, 1990). A professional makeup artist and hair stylist would administer the class three days a week. The girls would work extra hard to keep their grades up and stay out of trouble in order to participate in this program. The main event was a fashion show featuring the Magoffin Models. Mr. Aguirre went out to local shops and asked for donations. Tuxedos and shoes were donated for the boys and the models' wardrobe was provided by various shops in a local mall. The outfits were then professionally dry-cleaned and returned to the shops. Like all of the other programs Mr. Aguirre brought into the schools, this too was a success.

The majority of students who were involved in Mr. Aguirre's programs have graduated from high school or received their G.E.D. In one incident, a student who was kicked out of Bowie High School for physically assaulting a teacher, was placed in Mr. Aguirre's school and became involved first hand with Mr. Aguirre and his program. Later that year, the same student was photographed kissing Mr. Aguirre on the cheek as an expression of appreciation. This is but one example of how a bit of love and attention can result in real changes in school.

CONCLUSION

Safe schools offer instruction to all students concerning self-awareness, social relationships and skills and personal development. They create and maintain a perception of belonging and commitment to the school. Safe schools have principals who are strong leaders and are willing to take the initiative to create programs that lead to a positive social environment that surrounds students and staff. Such principals have an open and flexible administrative structure that emphasizes cooperation and involvement by all.

There is no absolute solution to school violence that can be applied uniformly. Schools are as diverse as the neighborhoods and communities that comprise them. However, with innovation, creativity, dedication, and patience, principals can prevent or minimize such violence and create a safer and better learning environment for our children.

School Patrol (Aguirre 1987).

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Models (Reid, 1990)

Modeling at the fashion show (Reid, 1990).

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Student accused of assaulting a teacher.

TOP: He is showing appreciation toward MR. Aguirre for all his support.

BOTTOM: A successful graduate (Aguirre, 1987).

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